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News Releases

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USDA ISSUES FAT—LOWERING CHANGES FOR LAMB GRADING STANDARDS

WASHINGTON, May 18—The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced changes in the U.S. standards for lamb, yearling mutton and mutton that should encourage the production of leaner lamb.

Daniel D. Haley, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said the changes will achieve fat reduction through the use of grading standards by "coupling" quality and yield grades. Coupling will require carcasses to be graded for both quality and yield.

USDA also will require that grades be applied to carcasses only after removal of their kidney and pelvic fat. Requiring the removal of pelvic and kidney fat (which can be considerable in sheep) prior to weighing carcasses for determining their "dressed" yields eliminates a major incentive for overfattening lambs.

Currently, U.S. quality grades for lamb—U.S. Prime, Choice and Good—can be applied independently of obtaining a yield grade, and yield grading of lamb is uncommon, Haley said.

"Ultimate payment to producers will be more for the lean portion of the carcass than the fat," Haley said.

The revised standards also will drop "leg conformation" scoring, part of the lamb, yearling mutton and mutton yield grade criteria since their inception in 1969. USDA researchers have found that conformation, or external shape, can be affected both by fat and muscle, and therefore may not be a true measure of the ratio of "lean" in an animal.

Implementation of the standards, Haley said, responds to consumers' preference for leaner meat. The changes will apply to standards for grading sheep carcasses as well as to live sheep traded on the basis of grades.

As in all USDA grading programs, use of the lamb grading service is voluntary and paid for by the user.

Details of the changes in the lamb and mutton grading standards will appear as a final rule in the May 19 Federal Register. Copies will be available from Herbert C. Abraham, Livestock and Meat Standardization Branch, AMS, USDA, Rm. 2603-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C.

20090-6456; telephone (202) 720-4486. The revised standards will become effective July 6.

Rebecca Unkenholz, (202) 720-8998.

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NEW POTATO IS A REAL CHIPPER

WASHINGTON, May 18—Coastal Chip, a new potato for making chips, will be good news for growers if it's a hot summer, a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist said today.

"We're hoping Coastal Chip will fill the market gap that can occur when growers have problems with Atlantic, the most popular variety now used for potato chips in the Northeast," said Kathleen G. Haynes.

Haynes, a plant geneticist with USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Beltsville, Md., said that the new potato, unlike Atlantic, is not affected by hot weather during the growing season.

"Heat stress reduces Atlantic's internal quality and causes necrotic brown areas inside the potatoes. Not only does this cause chips to be offcolor, but it can also cause brown splotches on the chips," she said.

"So, we named this new variety Coastal Chip because of its special ability to adapt to the heat-stressed areas of the East Coast".

Another advantage over Atlantic, Haynes said, is that the new round, potatoes make crisp, light colored chips for a longer period after they are harvested. Coastal Chip yields about the same as Atlantic, not unusual since they are full siblings, said Haynes.

Haynes and scientists at several East Coast universities cooperated in developing the new variety. It was used by some growers in the 1990 and 1991 crop years and is expected to be planted on a larger scale this year.

Scientists began performance trials along the East Coast in 1986 and grower trials in 1987 that continued through the 1989 growing season.

"We had a problem with the new variety in Pennsylvania," Haynes said. "The potatoes became sunburned before harvest, causing purple streaks that showed up in chips. This problem came from inadequately mounding the earth over the potatoes, a practice called hillling."

Growers in North Carolina, Virginia, New York, New Jersey and Maine, she said, didn't have this problem.

ARS, the Agricultural Experiment Stations of Virginia, New York,

Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maine, and the ARS of North Carolina State University jointly released Coastal Chip in 1990.

"So far, the new potato has been grown only on a preliminary basis outside the Northeast," Haynes said.

Tolerant to Verticillium wilt, Coastal Chip resists potato virus A and race A of the golden nematode.

Doris Stanley (301) 504-8767

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USDA FINALIZES DETAILS FOR NATIONAL BOLL WEEVIL CONTROL PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, May 19—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has prepared the final environmental impact statement for a national, cooperative boll weevil control program which selects eradication with "full federal involvement across the Cotton Belt," an APHIS official said today.

According to USDA's record of decision, APHIS will cooperate with state agriculture departments, the cotton industry and other state and federal agencies in the beltwide eradication program. The environmental impact statement found program activity will have no significant unavoidable effects on the environment.

"Beltwide eradication will allow us to unify our efforts and work across state and county lines to use an integrated pest control procedure, including cultural, mechanical, chemical and sterile-insect control methods," said B. Glen Lee, APHIS deputy administrator for plant protection and quarantine.

"Measures will be undertaken to ensure that endangered and threatened species are protected," he said.

A destructive pest of cotton, the boll weevil infests 7 million acres of cotton and causes in excess of \$300 million in annual losses and control costs across the southern United States.

People who want copies of the record of decision may get them from the following APHIS-PPQ regional directors: Al Elder, 3505 25th Ave., Building 1 North, Gulfport, Miss. 39501; Robert L. Williamson, 3505 Boca Chica Blvd., Suite 360, Brownsville, Texas 78521-4065; and James Reynolds, 9580 Micron Ave., Suite 1, Sacramento, Calif. 95827.

A reference copy may be reviewed at the APHIS Reading Room, 1141-S, 14th St. and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays.

Lorie Dankers (301) 436-8718

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USDA RADAR HELPS ENSURE THAT HISTORIC INDIAN BURIAL SITE REMAINS UNDISTURBED

WASHINGTON—It looked very similar to a “Catch-22.” Soil scientists and conservationists in northwestern Vermont wanted to prevent a 2,000-year-old American Indian burial ground from eroding into a river—but they didn’t know how far its boundaries extended. At the same time, they didn’t want to dig to find the boundaries—because in the process they’d disturb those same sacred grounds they were trying to protect.

Then the U.S. Department of Agriculture activated its ground-penetrating radar system, and the situation became resolvable.

Conservationists and engineers from USDA’s Soil Conservation Service were among those helping to stabilize a river bank site on the Mississquoi River to prevent its erosion. However, as they shored up the river bank, they wanted to avoid disturbing any parts of an ancient burial ground of the Abenaki Indian Tribe in Highgate, Vt.

Part of the complication was that the burial ground itself was eroding into the Mississquoi River which flows by that location.

“Our concern was that we just didn’t know if we’d be digging up old soft drink cans and hunks of rock—or ancient artifacts, including human remains,” said Jim Monahan, SCS district conservationist from the agency’s field office in St. Albans, Vt. “The paradox was that, once we would have realized that we had unearthed artifacts or human skeletons, it would be too late to keep from disturbing those items and extend to them the respect they warranted.”

“So we turned to our ground-penetrating radar system.”

He explained that the ground-penetrating radar system, or GPR, is a device housed in a wooden “sled” that is pulled along the ground by a truck. As it is being dragged, the radar shoots out short bursts of

electromagnetic energy about 70-100 feet down into the soil, depending on such characteristics as the density of the soil.

Inside the truck is a printer which records, on a printout, any reflections from underground items that are in the path of the radar beam. As each pulse strikes layers of substances with different electromagnetic properties—whether soil, rock, water, air, or materials made by humans—part of the pulse is reflected back and registered on the graphic recorder.

The recorder then prints images in six shades from black to white, depending on the strength of the returning signals.

Scientists can then review the printed images—on-the-spot, if required—without the necessity of laboriously testing soil samples and then waiting for the results.

“It’s much faster and less costly, plus—especially in this case—it allows us to avoid digging up the area to reach our conclusions,” Monahan said.

An SCS assistant state soil scientist concluded that this two-acre site did, in fact, contain artifacts, possibly including human remains.

As a result, SCS conservationists worked with officials from Vermont’s Division of Historic Preservation and altered the design of its streambank stabilization project to minimize any disturbance at any part of the Abenaki Indian Tribe’s ancient burial ground. Monahan said SCS plans to complete the project by this summer.

Richard Arnold, director of SCS’s Soil Survey Division, said that SCS has three ground-penetrating radar systems. “They’re located around the country, but they’ve also been used overseas,” he said.

For instance, a team took a GPR to a site near Beersheba in southeast Israel in 1988. Team members used the device to help locate an underground water cistern believed to be more than 2,500 years old.

More recently, a ground-penetrating radar system was put to a unique use in Columbia, S.C. According to Roy Vick, SCS assistant state soil scientist, last June he and members of an agency GPR team from Florida surveyed a site on the property of the South Carolina Department of Corrections.

“The site was initially reported to have unmarked graves,” he said. SCS state soil scientist Ben Stuckey had read about the coroner’s plans to dig up a sizable part of the property in order to corroborate rumors of unreported deaths—and subsequent secret burials—of inmates. So he offered SCS assistance to prevent disturbing such a large area of soil.

Consequently, Vick and members of the SCS GPR team visited the site, with their ground-penetrating radar system literally in tow.

"The radar showed several areas of disturbances, which we then flagged to show the county where to dig," Vick said. "Because of the pinpointing of our radar, they found the remains of two bodies in the vicinity of where we told them to dig."

Corrections officials dug up the remains, which were then subject to forensic tests. "Those tests showed that the remains were approximately 75 years old," Vick said.

"Since the prison had only been on that property for about 40 years, they were able to squelch the rumor, once and for all, that the remains were bodies of prisoners who had been murdered and then surreptitiously buried."

Monahan said that normally SCS specialists are working with farmers and ranchers on soil surveys and related activities. "But this time," he said, "we got to do something that helped preserve a different part of this country's heritage."

Anne Dudas (802) 951-6795
Issued: May 20, 1992

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USDA ADDS HORSE IMPORTATION CENTER IN NEW MEXICO

WASHINGTON, May 20—The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced it is adding Santa Teresa, N.M., to the list of approved U.S.-Mexican border ports for the importation of horses from Mexico.

"The addition of Santa Teresa as a horse import facility will accommodate the entry of large shipments of horses into the United States from Mexico," said Billy G. Johnson, deputy administrator for veterinary services in USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The APHIS-supervised inspection and animal-holding station in Santa Teresa is approximately ten miles from an import station in El Paso, Texas. The Santa Teresa center began operating as a border port of entry for cattle and other ruminants in January and has the necessary facilities for inspecting large shipments of horses for exotic pests and diseases.

Last year, over 3,500 horses were imported from Mexico. The El Paso import station is currently the only Mexican border port of entry for

horses between the approved ports at Columbus, N.M., and Presidio, Texas.

Notice of the proposal is scheduled for publication in the May 22 Federal Register. Comments will be accepted if they are received on or before June 22. An original and three copies of written comments referring to docket 92-036 should be sent to Chief, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, USDA, Room 804 Federal Building, 6505 Belcrest Road, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

Comments may be inspected at USDA, Rm. 1141-S, 14th St. and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays.

Kendra Pratt (301) 436-4898

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USDA ANNOUNCES GSM-102 EXPORT CREDIT GUARANTEES FOR SALES TO RUSSIA FOR FY 92

WASHINGTON, May 20—Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan today announced the allocation of \$600 million in export credit guarantees for sales by U.S. exporters of U.S. agricultural commodities to Russia under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Export Credit Guarantee Program (GSM-102).

Of the \$600 million, \$300 million is allocated effective immediately, \$150 million will be made available on or around July 1, and \$150 million will be made available on or around Aug. 1.

Madigan said today's announcement allocates by commodities the export credit guarantees President Bush announced May 6 in connection with sales to Russia.

The commodity breakdown for today's \$300 million allocation is: \$112.0 million for wheat, \$78.5 million for feed grains (corn, barley, sorghum and oats), \$26.0 million for protein meals (soybean meal, cottonseed meal, linseed meal, and sunflower seed meal), \$13.85 million for tallow, \$6.4 million for vegetable oil (soybean, cottonseed, peanut, linseed, corn and sunflowerseed), and \$24.75 million unallocated.

Details regarding the unallocated amount of \$24.75 million and further allocations among commodity-specific lines will be announced at a later date.

The commodity-specific allocations announced today represent guaranteed values relative to f.o.b. (free on board) or f.a.s. (free along side) values of any commodities sold, including any sold on c&f (cost and freight) or c.i.f. (cost, insurance and freight) basis. The commodity lines may be increased by an amount not to exceed \$38.5 million in total to cover the additional value of the commodity sold on either a c&f or c.i.f. basis, point of ocean vessel discharge.

A U.S. exporter who applies for a USDA export credit guarantee in connection with a sale made on a c&f or c.i.f. basis will be required to submit an estimate of the freight charges that will be incurred in connection with the sale. USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation will maintain a running tally of such estimated freight charges and, after the tally reaches \$38.5 million, CCC will approve applications only for the f.o.b. or f.a.s. value of any sales even if the sale was made by the exporter on a c&f or c.i.f. basis.

GSM-102 export credit guarantees will be available to cover only the f.o.b. or f.a.s. value of any commodities that move on ocean going vessels flagged in Russia. CCC will not provide coverage of the insurance component of c.i.f. sales.

Madigan said U.S. exporters must maintain records, in accordance with 7 C.F.R. 1493.100 of the GSM-102 regulations (56 F.R.25998, June 6, 1991), demonstrating arrival of the commodities in the eligible country of destination.

Madigan also said the CCC will guarantee 100 percent of the principal on credit extended in connection with sales under this allocation, as well as provide interest coverage equal to the coupon equivalent yield of the 52-week U.S. Treasury bill auction average.

Based on the most recently announced 52-week Treasury bill rate, the applicable guarantee fee on the individual sales under this allocation will be determined, at the time CCC receives the exporter's application for payment guarantee, in accordance with Program Announcement GSM-91-5 released by USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service Sept. 27, 1991. Eligible interest will be determined as of the date of export and thereafter will be subject to adjustment as of each principal and/or interest due date and remain in effect through the next interest and/or principal due date.

All applications for export credit guarantees are subject to price review.

The bank qualified by CCC to issue letters of credit in connection with these guaranteed sales is Vneshekonombank.

To be eligible for up to three-year coverage, all sales must be registered by Sept. 30, and exporters' contractual agreements must call for exportation not later than Nov. 30.

U.S. exporters registering for export credit guarantees must report to CCC the actual export period as provided in their credit sale. Exporters should not simply use the final export date listed under announcements authorizing the guarantees.

In accordance with 7 C.F.R. 1493.60(d) of the GSM-102 regulations, the final date of exportation to be shown on the payment guarantee will be one month after the contractual deadline for exporting.

U.S. exporters must apply to CCC for coverage before exports are completed and written applications must be accompanied by payment of an export credit guarantee fee.

For further information, call (202) 720-3224. For 24-hour information on Export Credits activities, call (202) 690-1621.

Rebecca Broeking (202) 720-3448

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